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Grice and Heidegger on the Logic of Conversation

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Abstract: What justifies one interlocutor to challenge the conversational expectations of the other? Paul Grice approaches conversation as one instance of joint action that, like all such action, is governed by the Cooperative Principle. He thinks the expectations of the interlocutors must align, although he acknowledges that expectations can and do shift in the course of a conversation through a process he finds strange. Martin Heidegger analyzes discourse as governed by the normativity of care for self and for another. It is the structure of care that warrants disrupting the presumed cooperative horizon of a conversation in order to occasion some new insight. The chapter expands Heidegger's ontological conception of care to make sense of the exigencies of conversation. Conversation requires taking cognizance of (1) the human good, (2) the specifics of the conversational context, and (3) one's responsibilities for the other. This threefold understanding can provide directives for subverting the interlocutor's expectation for the purposes of a given conversation.

In his *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin lists "silence" as the second of the thirteen virtues that he wishes to make his own. He expresses this virtue with the following precept: "Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation" (Franklin 1906: 86). He explains that he has a penchant for "prattling, punning, and joking," and he accordingly wishes to listen more and to speak less (Franklin 1906: 88). In an earlier chapter, he mentions the reason he rarely wished to listen to the only Presbyterian preacher in Philadelphia: because his sermons were concerned with confessional rather than ethical matters, Franklin found them "very dry, uninteresting, and unedifying" (Franklin 1906: 84). In this way, Franklin counsels us to speak to benefit others and thereby avoid the censure of being uninteresting. His musings raise the question concerning the logic of conversation. This logic is implicit in the ordinary ways in which we evaluate conversational moves, whether those of our own or of others.

When we judge that a move in a conversation is interesting, we do not attend to the words but the articulation of the world that is so offered; to say that something said is interesting is to

say that the person who says it is perceptive and it is therefore worthwhile to see the world from the proffered vantage point. To say that something is uninteresting is to say that in this case one does not gain much from viewing the world from that person's point of view; that in this case the person is not particularly perceptive or insightful. Conversation aims at having the world articulated, highlighted, intensified through the interchange of points of view.

The question what we should say if and when we speak is a topic of considerable interest today. Paul Grice (1991) introduced the theme into contemporary analytic philosophy by clarifying the communicative motives implicit in speech acts. According to his "Cooperative Principle," a conversation ought to unfold according to the implicit expectations of the interlocutors, although he calls attention to the puzzling phenomenon in which a conversation can profitably shift expectations. Grice's Cooperative Principle has also spawned contemporary speech pragmatics. Sperber and Wilson think conversation, like all communication, is governed by the principle of relevance: I think what I have to say is beneficial enough to be worth your effort of listening, and I listen to you on the assumption that what you have to say will be beneficial enough to me to be worth my effort of listening (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 156-57). The Gricean-pragmatist approach raises foundational questions concerning what counts as beneficial and so relevant, which trade on questions concerning the nature of the two interlocutors. Also pressing is the question concerning what conditions might obtain that would justify subverting the expected horizon of a given discourse.

The puzzling but central character of cooperation and relevance for conversation happens upon terrain earlier explored by phenomenological authors, especially Martin Heidegger. According to phenomenology, conversation is not in fact a species of joint action whose horizon is determined by prior purposes; conversation is instead a joint activity whose end is to share the

truth of the world more explicitly (Engelland 2014; McMullin 2013: 174-76; Carman 2003: 238-41; Taylor 1985: 259). There is therefore the obligation to disrupt the presumed horizon of a given conversation if it be possible and advisable to occasion a deeper understanding of the truth of things. Even before deciding to cooperate for the purposes of a given conversation, we are geared toward one another in care.

In this chapter, I would like to focus on the logic of conversation and the question of what justifies one interlocutor to challenge the conversational expectations of the other. I first turn to Grice who approaches conversation as one instance of joint action that, like all such action, is governed by the Cooperative Principle. He thinks the expectations of the interlocutors must align, although he acknowledges that expectations can and do shift in the course of a conversation through a process he finds strange. I then attend to Martin Heidegger's analysis of discourse as governed by the normativity of care for self and for another. It is the structure of care that warrants disrupting the presumed cooperative horizon of a conversation in order to occasion some new insight. Finally, I expand Heidegger's ontological conception of care to make sense of the exigencies of conversation. In my view, conversation requires taking cognizance of (1) the human good, (2) the specifics of the conversational context, and (3) one's responsibilities for the other. This threefold understanding can provide directives for subverting the interlocutor's expectation for the purposes of a given conversation. Care moves us to bear witness to the human good, in this situation, with others for whom I am responsible given my practical identities.

1. Grice on Cooperation and Conversation

Question: “How was the flight?” Reply: “Let’s just say I’ll never fly again.” Here the statement, “I’ll never fly again,” does not literally answer the question. It is also false in its literal meaning; the speaker has no intention of avoiding air transportation in the future. But it answers the question by way of implicature: the flight must have been really bad to motivate a (feigned) resolution never to fly again. In order to explain how such implicatures work, Grice needs to explain their context, everyday conversation. To do so, he identifies the basic principle present in conversation, the Cooperative Principle, which he formulates as follows: “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice 1991: 26). He then draws from Kant’s categories to articulate four groups of supporting maxims.

Under the category Quantity, he specifies that a conversation contribution should provide neither too much nor too little information. One can here think of a conversation gone awry because one of the participants is making personal disclosures out of keeping with the context. Under the category Quality, he provides more important guidance. First there is what he calls a “supermaxim” that governs conversation: “Try to make your contribution one that is true” (Grice 1991: 27). Second, he adds two specific maxims: do not utter falsehoods and do not speak without sufficient grounds for thinking what you say is true. Truthfulness or veracity anchors most types of conversation, although one could imagine an acceptable language game that involves telling tall tales; Grice’s point, I take it, is that the purpose of the speaker should match the purpose of the hearer; if the hearer expects truth, which the hearer usually does, that’s what the speaker should provide. Under the category of Relation, Grice adduces a single maxim, “Be relevant.” A conversation can get sidetracked, stalled, or come to grief due to inappropriate

conversational contributions. While the first three categories relate to what is said, the fourth category, Manner, concerns the how of what is said. The supermaxim he adduces is “Be perspicuous” under which he specifies various goals such as clarity, distinctness, brevity, and orderliness. One cannot help but think of student papers, the worst of which are not conversational contributions because they are obscure, ambiguous, and jumbled. With these four categories, Grice provides some content to his Cooperative Principle governing conversation, the observance of which makes conversation possible.

Grice gives his analysis of the Cooperative Principle as background to making sense of implicature in which we mean and can be taken to mean more than what we say. In this connection, it is noteworthy that the word “interesting” can carry an implicature. We may be asked for our opinion of something we found deeply unsatisfactory but, because it would be indelicate of us to say so, we reply, “It was interesting.” We may share with our friends an article advocating a controversial point and say we found it “interesting,” which expresses a noncommittal attitude that is projected so as to not come across as overbearing. It may seem that we offer a measured positive evaluation when in fact we do no such thing. Now, our interlocutor will be able to detect such implicatures provided they know us well enough. That we should use the vague term “interesting” could appear to undermine the Cooperative Principle; in the category Quantity, it provides too little information; in the category of Manner, it is ambiguous; in the category of Quality, its ambiguity erodes confidence in truthfulness; and in the category of Relation, such a conversational contribution can appear flippant and irrelevant. However, this pressure on the Cooperative Principle alerts the thoughtful hearer that the speaker is meaning more than what is said. The specific context of the conversation and the background beliefs mutually known to hearer and speaker can serve thereby to make the conversational contribution

known as a contribution that supplies the right amount of information, is perfectly clear in its expression, is truthful, and is relevant. To make sense of this implicature, it might be useful to add another maxim under the category of Manner: “Don’t needlessly offend.” This would accommodate various submaxims, such as “If you can’t say something nice about it, say it was interesting” or “Offer challenging views as suggestive rather than assertive.” For his part, Grice gives the example of “Be polite,” noting that there are aesthetic, social, and moral maxims outside of the conversational ones he has identified that may lead to implicatures (Grice 1991: 28). My own sense is that the maxim, “Don’t needlessly offend,” is a requirement of conversation rather than an extraneous social maxim; if, as Grice suggests, conversation has as its aim mutual illumination of the truth it requires a mutually supportive context which excludes unnecessary conflict.

Grice’s appeal to the logic of conversation also provides some direction for understanding what is happening when we use the word “interesting” in a straightforward way without any implicature. Something that is interesting is not something particularly associated with Quantity, Quality, or Manner—the amount of information, its reliability, or its mode of expression —although these are not unrelated to something’s being taken to be interesting. Too much or too little information might deaden or fail to enkindle interest in a thing, and fiction can sometimes outperform fact in terms of interest. Something that is interesting, however, does especially concern the category of Relation and its supermaxim of relevance, which specifies that contributions must be appropriate. Grice, for his part, seems to think this category the most interesting to think about; its simplicity masks a host of complex issues:

Though the maxim itself is terse, its formulation conceals a number of problems that exercise me a good deal: questions about what different kinds and focuses of relevance there may be, how these shift in the course of a talk exchange, how to allow for the fact that subjects of conversation are legitimately changed, and so on. I find the treatment of

such questions exceedingly difficult, and I hope to revert to them in later work (Grice 1991: 27).

What makes something interesting and so relevant? How can relevance constrain the horizon of a conversation and rupture the horizon of a conversation? How can conversation as cooperative behavior presupposing a shared goal come to adopt a new goal in its unfolding? What's at the bottom of relevance that makes it shared and dynamic?

John Searle follows Grice in zeroing in on the question of relevance for making sense of the logic of conversation. He notes that "a topic must be, as such, an object of interest to the speaker and hearer" (Searle 2002: 187). The invocation of interest in turn involves the purpose of the interlocutors, a purpose that is not determined by conversation in general and that, in fact, may shift in the course of a conversation. Precisely because conversation remains open to different purposes Searle cannot render its logic with the same sort of precision he rendered speech acts (Searle 2002: 193). Nonetheless, he does proceed to characterize conversation as a kind of joint action that calls upon a preintentional background, and it is just this involvement with a preintentional background that determines the relevance at work in a conversation (Searle 2002: 198-199). What I find valuable about his engagement with Grice is the recognition that the principle of relevance entails something prior to a specific conversation for its comprehension. Referring to this as the background rightly suggests an apriori dimension, although Searle's account of the background is notoriously ambiguous (Dreyfus 1991: 103-105, Ratcliffe 2004). What is this background, and how does it explain shifts in relevance?

2. Heidegger on Care and Reticence

From Grice, we have a rich account of conversation as a joint action that operates in light of a joint commitment to being helpful, truthful, relevant, and clear. This account of conversation

gives us resources to understand possible implicatures concerning the word, “interesting.” As Grice and Searle note, it also raises important questions about the nature and scope of relevance. But it leaves the ordinary plain sense of interesting underdeveloped, and it leaves the background of relevance underdetermined. To shed light on this sense of interesting and its context, it is helpful to turn to Heidegger, who distinguishes between being interested in something and finding it interesting:

[1] Inter-est [*Inter-esse*] means to be between and among things, to stand in the midst of a thing and to remain near it. [2] But today’s interest accepts as valid only what is interesting [*Interessante*]. And interesting is the sort of thing that can freely be regarded as indifferent the next moment, and be displaced by something else, which then concerns us just as little as what went before. Today, one often takes the view that one especially honors something by finding it interesting. The truth is that such a judgment has already relegated the interesting thing to the ranks of what is indifferent [*das Gleichgültige*] and soon boring (WCT/WHD: 5/6-7).¹

The etymological sense of interest expresses something of Heidegger’s research into the condition for the possibility of intentionality. It fulfills Heidegger’s formulation of care from *Being and Time*: “the being of Dasein means ahead-of-itself-being-already-in-(the-world) as being-near [*Sein-bei*] (entities encountered within-the-world)” (BT/SZ: 237/192). This formula compactly expresses the interplay of affectivity and spontaneity enabled by timeliness in which the manifestation of things is possible. The human is not only thrown open in terms of disposed understanding, but in virtue of this being thrown open the human can encounter things in their otherness (Engelland 2017: 32-38). And, so encountered, things can show themselves from themselves via a phased structure: human beings begin by directing-themselves-toward a topic of investigation; then they grow into a dwelling-with that item; on that basis, they can apprehend or interpret the item; finally, they can preserve that apprehension as a modification of their original directing-themselves-toward the thing (HCT/GA20: 163/219-20). The authentic sense of interest, its placing us near a thing, enables us to know the thing in question.

Heidegger also mounts a criticism of contemporary talk, namely that it has reduced interest to what is interesting. What's interesting functions like the index finger—it singles out but only momentarily; in the next moment it will point out something else. When it comes to what is interesting, Heidegger thinks we are all too easily determined by what everyone (*das Man*) thinks, which constitutes the Public (*die Öffentlichkeit*). By reading the newspaper, watching television, or reading blog posts we are habituated to a certain interpretation of what counts as pleasurable, entertaining, fearful, and shocking: "...we do not say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what *everyone says* [man ... sprichte] about the matter" (HCT/GA20: 56/75). The Public treats everything as equally important. By consequence, it never attains the things that really matter (BT/SZ: 165/127). To reach the thing pointed out, to reach the thing that is interesting, requires an authentic devotion, a break from the logic of distraction warding off boredom. It requires entering into wonder in order to bring something near and exhibit it as such. The word "interesting" is thus ambiguous and slippery. While we appeal to it thinking we have fulfilled the authentic sense of being in the midst of something, we all too easily express a superficial attitude of fundamental indifference to the topic in question.

How does Heidegger's meditation on interest and care illuminate the logic of conversation? He roots conversation in the joint openness afforded by care: "Words emerge from that *essential agreement* of human beings with one another, in accordance with which they *are open in their being with one another for the beings around them*, which they can then individually agree about—and this also means fail to agree about" (FCM/GA29/30: 309/447). Heidegger spends much of his thought unpacking what constitutes this essential agreement, an agreement that, among other things, makes conversation possible. "In discourse being-with becomes 'explicitly' *shared*; that is to say, it *is* already, but it is unshared as something that has

not been grasped and appropriated” (BT/SZ: 205/162). Like Grice, Heidegger sees conversation as a specific possibility of a more general ability. Beyond Grice, he situates the possibility of joint action within the transcendental structure of human existence and its shared truth (Crowell 2013, Golob 2014, Engelland 2015, Engelland 2017). Heidegger thereby grounds the Cooperative Principle in care-for or solicitude (*Fürsorge*). Talking to others about things is a matter of letting them see what is pointed out (BT/SZ: 197/155).

Heidegger observes that solicitude admits of negative and positive modes as well as inauthentic and authentic ones. Quite often, we are indifferent to those we encounter, an indifference that is deficient in solicitude. But we can show our care for others positively in two ways: either by leaping in for them and completing the task in their stead, which creates a relation of dependence, or by leaping ahead of them and enabling them to complete the task for themselves, a move which frees them to come into their own. Heidegger applies these possibilities of solicitude to joint action in a way that is applicable to a conversation. Participants may mistrust each other and thereby exercise solicitude in a negative mode, but it is also possible for them to exercise an authentic positive mode which frees each to deal with the thing in question together:

When they devote themselves to the same thing [*Sache*] in common, their doing so is determined by the manner in which their Dasein, each in its own way, has been affected. They thus become *authentically* bound together, and this makes possible the right kind of objectivity [*die rechte Sachlichkeit*], which frees the other in his freedom for himself (BT/SZ: 159/122).

Heidegger, then, would see Grice’s Cooperative Principle as governing a certain positive and indeed authentic possibility of solicitude for others. He does not refrain from using the language of maxim to discuss such existential possibilities: “Insofar as it determines the execution of a possibility of the very existence of Dasein, a principle is also called a *maxim*” (HCT/GA20:

85/104).² In this way, to do justice to the logic of conversation, we might follow Heidegger and expand the category of Relation to accommodate various modes of community. It would then carry certain maxims such as “Care for others,” “Help by enabling (rather than substituting for) their freedom,” and the like.

Among the possibilities of discourse, Heidegger identifies “discretion” or “reticence” (*Verschwiegenheit*) as an authentic one. Rather than fall prey to idle talk, which talks carelessly about something and flits from topic to topic, reticence is prone to silence. In the space of that silence it can really listen to another and it can take time to ponder before speaking (BT/SZ 208/165, 218/174). In this way, reticence makes room for the silent summons of conscience, which brings the self thoughtfully back to itself and its openness to the world (BT/SZ 318/273). Reticence makes us answerable to others through fostering a readiness to give reasons for our decisions (Crowell 2013: 225-227). What Heidegger gives us to understand is that all too easily we will keep to what is merely interesting and thereby remain immune to the truth of things. Silence, opened up by reticence, holds such talk at bay. In doing so, it allows us to hear the other who speaks to us, to become thoughtful about what is, and to be attentive to the quiet call of conscience that provokes us to care. In this way, Heidegger’s analyses give us reason to expand Grice’s table of maxims still further:

Quantity: Remember that silence can be richly communicative (BT/SZ: 208/164-65).

Quality: Avoid idle talk by first making the topic one’s own (BT/SZ: 270/169). Making the topic one’s own wards off hearsay, gossip, and superficiality.

Relation: Avoid empty curiosity which seeks new experiences for the sake of novelty instead of for the sake of achieving understanding (BT/SZ: 216/172).

Manner: Endeavor to be reticent rather than fall prey to idle talk (BT/SZ: 342/296).

Grice wonders how the presumed aims of a conversation can be upended in the course of a conversation. Heidegger thinks that reticence enables such a transformation. In the “Letter on ‘Humanism’,” he illustrates this power by recalling the charming story Aristotle relates about Heraclitus (Aristotle 1941: 645a17-22). Moved by curiosity, a group of strangers seek out the great thinker, Heraclitus, only to be shocked that instead of finding him in meditation or disputation they find him silently warming himself by the kitchen stove. Heidegger comments, “The vision of a shivering thinker offers little of interest [*Interessanten*]. At this disappointing spectacle even the curious lose their desire to come any closer” (PM/GA9: 270/186). The seekers do not really seek; they remain at the level of admiration. Heidegger again comments, “The group hopes that in their visit to the thinker they will find things that will provide material for entertaining conversation [*Gerede*]—at least for a while” (PM/GA9: 270/185). Aristotle tells us that Heraclitus invites them through the door with the words, “Come in and don’t be afraid, for here too the gods are present.” Heraclitus is inviting them to shift from marveling to wonder, from a search for the unusual to a recognition of the usualness of the usual. He could have chased them off, of course, or let them wander away into the darkness, but he saw the opportunity, in the conversation, of challenging them to expand their horizon of inquiry. His conversational contribution, the fruit of reticence, expresses his having become the conscience of the strangers in such a way that he frees them from superficiality so that they might come into their own. As Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*:

Dasein’s resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the others who are with it “be” in their ownmost potentiality-for-being, and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates. When Dasein is resolute, it can become the “conscience” of others. Only by authentically being-their-selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another—not by ambiguous and jealous stipulations and talkative fraternizing in the “everyone” and in what “everyone” wants to undertake (BT/SZ: 344-45/298).

What Heraclitus says to the strangers is relevant to their good but not relevant to their preconceptions for what a conversation with the famous thinker would amount to. Heraclitus leaps ahead to set them free to care more deeply. In this case, the thinker disrupts Grice's Cooperative Principle by challenging the strangers' expectation regarding the conversation, but the thinker does so in light of a deeper commitment to the demands of solicitude for others, a demand that involves helping others be perceptive about what is most important.

Heidegger takes us further than Grice into the logic of conversation by detailing the solicitude and authenticity that can justify changes of relevance. Reticence challenges the presumed horizon of idle talk in order to make effective the words that really matter. If we are to revise Grice's Cooperative Principle in light of Heidegger's care, we might add a new maxim from Heraclitus: "Expect the unexpected" (Heraclitus 1979: 129). That is, an agreed aim of conversation is to be surprised, even concerning the presumed horizon of that conversation.

3. Filling in the Context of Care

Steven Crowell helpfully characterizes the content of conversation as follows: "What it means to be a good father, friend, or carpenter—and so also what it means to be a good person, morally good—is always the substance of 'the conversation that we ourselves are'" (Crowell 2013: 303). Conversation takes its bearings from the concrete context and content of care: that's what we spend our time talking about and that's what's involved in navigating shifts in relevance. Does Heidegger have the resources for making sense of the vicissitudes of conversation in terms of its concrete context and content?

Suppose a student calls upon a professor during office hours. What determines what the professor *should* and *should not* say? The student wants to figure out how to get an "A" in the

class so she can get into medical school; the professor wants to alert her to the issue of truth and wisdom. Yes, by all means, the professor should exercise care, but in what way? Here one is mindful of Sartre's critique of Kantian ethics as being too formal (Sartre 1993: 47). Yes, do not use another as a means to an end, but how might one decide what to do here and now? The alternative, pace Sartre, is not some sort of decisionism. Rather it is a matter of a prudential mindfulness of the specific contours of the situation, contours sketched but not fully outlined by Heidegger: "...when the call of conscience summons us to our potentiality-for-being, it does not hold before us some empty ideal of existence, but *calls us forth into the situation*" (BT/SZ 347/300). I would like to follow Heidegger and work out care in terms of its threefold context: the good to be expressed, the possibility for conversation here and now, and the inherited identities for speakers available for repetition and correction (BT/SZ 437/385). In this way, I recall and exceed Heidegger's temporal analysis as filling in the context of conversation in order to render intelligible disruptions in conversational expectations concerning content.

1. Futural: Wonder and the Human Good

While appropriating the theme of care from the Augustinian tradition via Scheler, Heidegger jettisons what he regards as a neo-Platonic overlay in both Scheler and Augustine (PRL/GA60: 199/265). The *ordo amoris* or order of love specifies not descriptively how one loves but prescriptively how one ought to love if one is to love well. Heidegger wishes to reduce the tiered sense of goods to the basic opposition of authenticity and inauthenticity. In terms of enacting fundamental ontology the opposition is perhaps sufficient; but in terms of making sense of the human good it is not. What disappears in this way is the good's complexity, which involves not only perspicacious self-awareness but also various grades of apprehended goods.

Scheler observes that there are idolatrous, inverted, and inadequate loves (Scheler 1973: 124). A student might want lots of money as if that were the highest good; he might want grades instead of learning; he might have an insufficient appreciation for the goods of the intellect. Or again a father might wish to be eminently successful in his career even if that means being woefully deficient in his fatherhood. Part of what we should talk about, as Crowell observes, is the question concerning what we should care about. For such a conversation to be worthwhile, the interlocutors must assume there is a difference between how one in fact loves and how one does well to love. That difference provides an important justification for exceeding the presumed horizon of relevance in a given conversation.

In challenging that horizon, an interlocutor does not seek to impose an external constraint but to elicit inward recognition of what, in truth, care should be about. The normativity can be found within each of us but the truth of the goods must come to light for them to be appreciated rightly. Instead of the careless indifference of boredom's *interesting*, which levels all differences, one appeals to the careful difference of wonder's authentic *interest*, which prioritizes more important topics. Curiosity and boredom rest content in superficial sameness; wonder and awe open up the stratification of goods. In truth, the student not only cares about money and the father not only about his career; there is a still deeper, if uncultivated, interest that must be awakened via wonder. Care naturally cares, but the truth of the grades of goods must be made plain so that we might care about the right things.

A sense of the various ingredients in the complete human good provides essential direction for determining conversation's content. The professor invites the student to find the contemplative character of human life—a responsibility for the truth of things operative in every mode of human life thoughtfully lived out—but part of this thoughtfulness involves recognizing

the importance of money for rightly caring for oneself and one's loved ones. Similarly, a friend might suggest to the professor that success in his career, which is a laudable goal, is secondary to success in raising his children. Both are goods but they are not equally important, and confusion on this point will prove blameworthy. Heidegger is right of course that there is no table of goods that can simply be intuited, but the stratification of goods can arise in experience due to differences in fulfillment (Engelland 2004). Precisely because of our finitude we can only pursue one good at a time and can therefore not pursue all goods at once. Finitude requires prioritization, requires serially choosing from among competing goods in order thereby over time to bring about the variegated human good. Just what constitutes the human good is, as Crowell suggests above, central to the human conversation, and it is more complicated than Heidegger realizes (Engelland 2017: 228-234).

2. Moment of Vision: What Is Appropriate in This Situation

Insight into the human good is not sufficient to warrant subverting the presumed aim of any and every conversation. Consider a Saturday morning conversation over the breakfast table. "What are we going to do today?" "Pursue the good and avoid the bad." Or, even if that conversational move is welcome it is only as a humorous statement of the obvious that will then call for a reissue of the question: "Are you heading to the store? Is there another birthday party this weekend?" Conversation involves not only a sense of the human good but also a sense for the moment, what is possible and relevant in this context, that trumps absolute considerations of the good. The reason for this is that we do need to attend to lesser goods in order to share life with others and only specific goods can be achieved via action.

The understanding of the human good is being offered to others as their own. Hence they must be induced to see it. Introducing it outside the appropriate moment will only serve to harden them to its allure. For a shift in relevance requires a previously established rapport, trust, and openness. Consider sitting on an airplane: one's inflight neighbor might be buried in a book or engrossed in a movie in such a way that he or she would tolerate a request to move so that one can go to the bathroom but would not regard that exchange as an opening for questions concerning the nature of the travel, the content of the book or movie, or one's life ambitions. Rapport relaxes and makes others available to conversational turns and surprises: it makes solicitude something that is felt. On the basis of the established rapport of solicitude, and given the specifics of the situation including the perceived mood of the moment, a shift in relevance becomes possible.

In this way, one must attend to what can and cannot be accomplished given the specific historical horizons of the conversation that are in play in the present moment (BT/SZ 345-48/298-300). As Heidegger points out, authentic resolve sizes up the situation in its peculiar juxtaposition of elements and realizes just what it is for. The question of what possibility this specific moment with its peculiar complex of factors might afford proves essential.

3. Having-Been: One's Responsibility Given One's Inherited Role Relative to This Person

What care calls for depends on the roles at play for the people in the situation. Yes, one has an obligation to everyone one meets, everyone who thanks to proximity is a neighbor, but more robust obligations come in being a spouse, a parent, a child, a friend, a teacher, a judge, a doctor, a mechanic, etc.. Crowell appeals to Christine Korsgaard's "practical identity" as determining reasons for acting as we do, as filling in the content of care (Crowell 2013: 290-91;

Korsgaard 1996: 100-102). A professor has reasons to mentor her students, doctors have reasons to care for their patients, a mother has reasons to parent her children, a friend has reasons to care for a friend, and so on.³ To value these identities is to have obligations to do certain actions. To be able to defend one's conversational choices, to answer the question, "Why did you say that?" (a question rarely verbalized but frequently expressed in a dumbfounded countenance), requires not only appealing to care but also what care requires for a father or mother, friend or neighbor, in just this situation. The roles specify arcs of solicitude that shape our understanding of our responsibility for disrupting suppositions about conversational purpose.

Practical identities help fill in Heidegger's invocation of the repetition of possibilities into which we are thrown (BT/SZ 437/385). We inherit an understanding of what these roles specify and in repeating these identities we simultaneously make them available to others. A professor, for example, not only aspires to be a good professor; in doing so she aspires to be memorable and formative so that any students who later assume the role will do so at least in part in light of the understanding of the role as shaped by their teacher's exercise of her practical identity. Similarly, what it means to be a parent is at least in part informed by our experience of parenthood and by the sorts of expectations our culture has regarding these roles. We say the sorts of things that a father or mother should say rather than the sorts of things that a friend, teacher, or doctor should say. Never do we strive to do simply what has been done; rather we strive to do what should be done taking inspiration from what has been done but never aping it except thoughtlessly. Thus these practical identities are always made our own as we select out what is exemplary from what is not. We strive to emulate the intervention of an inspiring teacher or parent rather than the talk of an incompetent teacher or parent.

Consider Heraclitus's visitors trekking to see the philosopher or the student frequenting a professor's office hours: here the philosopher or professor has a rich practical identity that specifies obligations towards the visitors or students. In particular, just to be a philosopher (or to a lesser extent, a philosophy professor) means to be obliged to risk unwelcome disruptions of the expectations of one's conversational interlocutors for the sake of their good, to bear witness to a higher good than the one presumed as the topic of the conversation. That indeed is a great part of what it means to be a philosopher, to resolve to be a gadfly, a conscience in the first place for oneself but also for others. After all, if the philosopher does not bear witness to the priority of wisdom, who on earth will? Heidegger recalls Aristotle's recollection of Heraclitus, but we might also attend to an even more famous episode of philosophical exchange. Socrates, on his deathbed, makes his last conversational contribution as follows: "Don't be careless" (Madison 2002). By bidding his disciples to take care, he recalls his central teaching as summarized in the *Apology*: "... are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?" (Plato 1997: 29d-e). Socrates's obligation as a gadfly is to enjoin his fellow citizens to care for wisdom, truth, and virtue rather than money or honor. The substance of what the philosopher should say is to take care; to bear the practical identity of a philosopher is to have reason to look to disrupt conversational expectations by enjoining interlocutors to attend to the truth of things. In doing so, philosophers might not make the most convivial of interlocutors. In the context of a conversation with a philosopher, one should expect to be challenged; one should expect shifts in relevance. Of course, there are other practical identities—doctor, carpenter, neighbor, citizen, and so on—that might oblige us to handle relevance with a

lighter touch. The art of conversation involves harmonizing and prioritizing one's practical identities in order to achieve insight into the requisite good of this particular conversation.

Conclusion

Benjamin Franklin counsels us that conversation ought to be beneficial and that we should accordingly avoid prattling on and speaking trifles. Pragmatics valuably recognizes that a given speech act calls upon an interpersonal context for its proper interpretation. The principle of relevance from pragmatics holds that I think the benefit of what I have to tell you will outweigh the trouble of your having to listen to what I say. This approach wrongly suggests a framework in which we are silent unless compelled to speak. Human beings, however, naturally talk just as naturally as they share the world with one another. Heidegger writes, "We are continually speaking in one way or another. We speak because speaking is natural to us. It does not first arise out of some special volition" (PLT/US: 189/11). The relation to the interlocutor is not established by a particular exchange; rather the exchange comes later, after a relationship has already been established by proximity. A conversation, moreover, need not inform in order to still achieve some good. To speak to someone means that that person is worth speaking to; the act as such embodies care and fortifies the interpersonal relationship even if the content is uninformative. Precisely because talking is the default, silence can be communicative; it alerts the puzzled interlocutors to the weight of speech by inviting them to pause and consider what really is worth saying, what really will benefit oneself and others. It thereby disrupts the hold that ordinary ruts of conversation has on us and enables us to plow new furrows.

When should we challenge the expected horizons of a conversation? The Grice-Searle worry about shifts in relevance receives clarification from Heidegger's appeal to care and

solicitude as the background of conversation. Authenticity enables us to achieve insight into the good for ourselves and for others, although the content of this good is more complex than Heidegger realizes. Some practical identities involve becoming a conscience for others. A mother, father, or friend has an obligation to elevate conversation to focus on higher human goods. A philosopher or other leader has the obligation to counsel others to take care. Other practical identities direct us to be less robust in our challenge to conversational expectations. The human good, the specific dynamics of this situation, and the obligations and possibilities specified by one's own role help fill in the specific content of care. Relevance takes its bearings from a solicitude constrained but also liberated by the context: constrained insofar as it makes certain conversational contributions out of bounds; liberated insofar as it makes certain conversational contributions needful and appropriate—that is, it frees us to be meaningful. What should we say when we speak carefully? That depends on our sense of the good, of this moment, and of the manner of our responsibility for the other. In this way, Heidegger's reticence, like Franklin's silence, frees us up to converse about things of genuine interest rather than things that are merely interesting. In doing so, it gives life to our conversations with each another.

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¹ For quotations of Heidegger, the first page number refers to the English and the second to the German edition: E/G. I have frequently modified the translations in view of uniformity and clarity.

² Heidegger has in mind the phenomenological “return to the things themselves” as the cardinal maxim.

³ Such roles hearken back to Plato’s rejoinder to Thrasymachus’s voluntarism: to be a ruler is to have a practical identity determined by the good of the ruled. Korsgaard specifically mentions the disintegration of the tyrant’s identity in *Republic* IX (Korsgaard 1996: 102).